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## **Leading Man: Peabody native Mello helps Endicott set records**

By Matt Williams staff writer

Danny Mello has never been a selfish athlete.

Whether it was dishing out assists on the basketball court at Peabody High, or showing up at every baseball practice to throw soft toss and help in any he could after knee surgery his junior season, taking care of teammates has always been at the top of Mello's to-do list.

It is an attitude that carried over to his approach at the plate this spring — and Endicott is thrilled with what he's brought to the table.

With Mello leading off, the Gulls set a slew of offensive records, including a new benchmark of 31 wins, and host Suffolk in the ECAC semifinals this morning (11 a.m.).

"It's really just a leadoff mentality — try to set the table for the guys behind me and put them in a good position," said Mello, who earned second-team All-Commonwealth Coast Conference honors at third base.

Truthfully, there are Royal butlers who wish they could set the table as well as Mello does. After leading the CCC in runs and stolen bases during the regular season, the junior set a single season Endicott record with 46 runs scored and needs one swipe this weekend to tie the Gulls' program mark for steals.

His 47 hits this season rank third all-time, as do his 13 doubles. Overall, Mello, whose older brother Matt played baseball at Salem State and is the Peabody freshman coach, is hitting .315, has 19 RBI and an on-base percentage of .444.

The third baseman's on-base acumen helped freshman Jake Northrup, the CCC Rookie of the Year, set a Gulls record with 53 RBI. Northrup also set a single season record for hits (69) and batted .457.

"If I had to describe Jake's season in one word it would be dominant," said Mello. "All I had to do was get on base, maybe steal a bag, and it was almost automatic that I was going to score a run.

"We've had an awesome year and broken a bunch of records, stats wise. We put up some serious numbers and played some of the best teams in New England. Hopefully, we showed around here that Endicott baseball is going to be a premier program."

### Fresh Start

The 2011 season was a complete turnaround for Mello, who was at a crossroads in his baseball career one year ago. After wrapping up a sophomore season in which he appeared in just 12 games at Bryant University in Rhode Island, the 2008 Peabody High graduate simply felt it was time to move on.

"I really just wanted to see what I could do with a full season. I met with coach (Bryan) Haley over the summer, and he told me that it was up to me to come out and earn a spot. Everything just fell into place for me."

In two seasons at Bryant, Mello appeared in 36 games. In his first season at Endicott, he started 46 times — and put up the kind of numbers that put a big smile on the face of his high school coach, Mark Bettencourt.

"Over the summer, I told their coach I thought Danny could be one of the best players in their league, and I said that with a lot of confidence because Danny Mello is one of the best players I've ever coached," said Bettencourt. "Not only that, but his work ethic is relentless."

A patient hitter who walked 23 times, was hit by a pitch 12 times and struck out only 11 times (the team low among starters), Mello needed confidence after two years of part-time play. With a hot start on Endicott's spring training trip to Florida, he found it.

"That was big for me. I think I was hitting around .350 out of the gate and I needed that confidence," said Mello.

#### Bright future

The Gulls (31-15 overall) would certainly rather be in the NCAA tournament this weekend, but the Blue-and-Green lost to Western New England twice last Sunday in the finals of the CCC tournament.

Endicott has just one senior, Chris Dominguez, and all seven of the Gulls that earned All-CCC honors will be back next year. So finishing on a positive note with an ECAC title at home will help carry good vibes into what could be a banner year in 2012.

"It was tough. The goal is always to win the league and go to the (NCAA) Regionals," said Mello. "But you have to move forward. We have eight out of nine starters back next year and we can start building for that right now."

The Gulls got unbelievable pitching in the conference tournament, and didn't even have to go to the bullpen in the first three games. Junior Ben Petrides was CCC Pitcher of the Year, sophomore Brendan Pittsley earned all-conference and Mike Nich and Tyler Hitchcock will both be back.

"The pitching staff worked so hard in the offseason. Everything they did was so intense, and coaches just pushed them and they're all great athletes," said Mello.

Outfielder Colin Sitarz and second baseman Eric Lemke were Endicott's other All-CCC honorees.

Endicott has increased its win total in each of Haley's four seasons on campus. A Brandeis graduate, Haley coached with Beverly native Brett Boretti at Columbia and has quickly returned Endicott to a spot among the top teams in New England. Peabody native Jon Cahill, who had an All-America career at UMass-Lowell, and Swampscott's Frank Defelice are the assistants.

#### SpRing for the Record Books

Endicott single season records set in 2011

Wins: 31

Runs scored: Danny Mello, 46

Hits: Jake Northrup, 69

RBI: Jake Northrup, 53

Doubles: Jake Northrup, 16

Hitting .457, Northrup can break the single season record for average (.460) this weekend. He can also set total bases, as he has 104 and the record of 105. Mello needs one steal to tie the stolen bases record (28) and if Colin Sitarz hits a triple, he'll tie that single season mark (8).

- Danny Mello's collegiate baseball career was at a crossroads last year, but he has found plenty of success at Endicott College.

